Mr. Mom: Stay-at-Home Fathers, Parenting, and Masculinity

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Abstract

This paper provides a look into the lives of 13 stay-at-home fathers. This qualitative, exploratory study conducted in-depth interviews with 13 men who defined themselves as stay-at-home fathers. Respondents were obtained through convenience sampling. Fathers were from several major metropolitan U.S. cities, from New York, Los Angeles, Boston, to Washington, D.C. All respondents were white, middle- to upper-middle class males. This study aims to analyze gender through the theories of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and structuralism (Risman, 1998). This paper argues that what dictates an individual to become a successful parent is not sex or a biological desire, but structural and situational demands. Due to financial reasons and time availability, these men were able to commit the time and energy needed to become a full-time parent. This paper also analyzes the different ways in which men construct masculinity when taking on an untraditional role. Stay-at-home fathers emphasize physical activity, sports, and a lack of emotional connection as a way of maintaining and constructing masculinity. This paper concludes that gender is not only socially constructed, but also that gender is constructed within the structural demands of the situation. Although stay-at-home fathers still find ways to construct masculinity, their stories demonstrate that they are just as capable as women to rise up to the challenges of full-time parenting. In conclusion, this study argues that good parenting knows no gender, and that government policies and programs should advocate for all different family structures.

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Introduction

It is a typical Wednesday afternoon, and you take a stroll through the neighborhood park. Children swing across the monkey bars and chase each other around the playground. A group of women sit off to the side, laughing and chatting. Their laps are full of juice boxes, snacks, and baby wipes. As you walk closer to these women, you realize that one of them is not a woman at all. In fact, she is a man. He is a father; and he is here at the park, in the middle of the day, with his children.

That is strange, you think to yourself. *His wife must be sick, and he is taking the day off from work*. You take a closer look and notice that the father is engaging in the conversation with the other mothers as if this were a daily routine. *Maybe he was laid off from work or he works a different schedule? Or maybe he stays at home with the children full time? But that couldn't be, or could it?*

Fathers who stay home with their children full time are gaining more and more of a presence in our society. According to the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau, stay-at-home fathers comprise 2.7% of all married, stay-at-home parents in the United States. While this percentage may seem small, the number of stay-at-home fathers increased by over 50% since 2002. Single fathers and gay couples also increase the number of families in which the father is the primary caregiver for the children. The traditional breadwinner father and stay-at-home mother family is becoming less and less of a reality in our society. Nuclear families based on traditional gender roles are no longer practical, given the changing economy and conflicting cultural practices in our present society (McGuffey, 2005). The structure and shape of families in America is changing. There is

no one type or model of family in the U.S., so why do we still cling so tightly to the traditional family ideal?

The image of the ideal, nuclear family is deeply entrenched in our cultural values and norms. When we speak of the family, we automatically imagine a wife, husband, and their children. The man is the hardworking breadwinner; the woman willingly and dutifully takes care of the home and the children. This image of the ideal family has been in place throughout history. In systems of patriarchy, men were the masters of the household, by custom and law. They ruled society and government (Smith, 2009). Some social scientists argue that the rigid gender roles within the family can be traced back to the sexual division of labor in ancient hunter/gatherer societies (Beer, 1983). Men left the women in search of food, while women stayed home to take care of the children.

In nonindustrial societies, production was organized in and through the household. All members of the family played a part in its function (Coltrane, 1996). Children were seen as commodities; they were valuable in helping the father tend the farm. Mothers, therefore, were responsible for breeding and raising strong children who could work for the family. Men and women operated in separate spheres, but their duties were connected (Coltrane, 1996).

The shift to an industrial, market economy also marked a shift in familial roles and values. The sentimental value of children increased, as they were no longer needed as a source of labor on the family farm (Coltrane, 1996). The "cult of domesticity" in the 19th century glorified motherhood to an admired status (Coltrane, 1996). Motherhood was the embodiment of femininity. For a mother to stay at home with the children was a sign of privilege; and therefore, became the goal of men and women.

The glorification of motherhood and the separation between spheres of work and domesticity heightened in the 1950s. During this decade, the marriage rate increased, people got married at an earlier age, and the divorce rate decreased (Coltrane, 1996). Men left their homes to make money in order to provide food and shelter for their families; and women stayed home with the children, cleaned the house, and cooked a delicious meal just in time for her husband's arrival (Smith, 2009). Television shows such as "Leave it to Beaver" portray the ideal family where "father knows best". The family stood at the center of good ol' American morals and values. The Family, with a capital F, became an institution in itself. However, these images of a father who not only worked outside the home, but also came home to play ball with his boys created a dilemma for fathers (Smith, 2009). There was a desire to increase a father's involvement in the family and provide sons with a good model of masculinity (Coltrane, 1996). Men were expected not only to be the breadwinner, but also to be more cooperative and involved in the lives of his wife and children (Smith, 2009).

Although this image of the perfect family has always had a presence in our society, it has never been the reality. Single-parent families and dual-income families have always existed; but they never receive the attention or glorification of a traditional, nuclear family. The existence of varying family structures is even more prevalent today. More and more women work outside the home, either by choice, for financial reasons, or both. In 2008, women comprised 46.5% of the U.S. labor force (U.S. Department of Labor). With the current divorce rate at 50%, single-parent families and stepfamilies are everywhere. The increase in same-sex marriages also leads to an increase in the number of children raised by gay and lesbian parents. Furthermore, due to the current state of the

economy most families need two incomes to support their family. According to the 2006 Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 60% of families with children under 18 were dual-income families.

Given the predominance of so many different family structures, it seems obvious that the traditional family is actually in the minority today. Why do we still hold onto The Family as the cornerstone of morality when it does not reflect on reality? We need to broaden the spectrum of what The Family looks like. We need to break down traditional definitions and remove the capital F. We need to reconstruct the idea of the family to reflect on the varieties of families in our country.

My study attempts to break down some of these rigid definitions. I studied a population about which little is known. I spoke with stay-at-home fathers about their lived experiences. I hoped to paint a picture of the typical day in a full-time father family. What are their daily tasks and routines? What are the responsibilities of the spouse as a parent? How are the household and childcare tasks divided, if at all, between the parents? How was it decided that the father would stay at home full-time?

Additionally, I hoped to discover the emotions and attitudes towards their duties and role as a full-time father. Overall, are they satisfied with their current position? How do they perceive the satisfaction of the spouse and children with the family structure? My findings to these questions reveal an overall perceived satisfaction in the spouse, children, and the fathers themselves. I hope that the positive experiences in these families will demonstrate stay-at-home fathers as a viable option for families.

Furthermore, I hope the stories of these men will help to dismantle obsolete, binary categories of gender. In conjunction with West and Zimmerman's theory on

"doing gender", I argue that gender is not comprised of fixed, biological categories (1987). Rather, gender is socially constructed through continuous interaction of expectations, roles, and behaviors on an individual, interpersonal, and institutional level. Throughout my research, I combine the idea of "doing gender" with structuralism. The family is one of the major institutions through which we simultaneously "do gender" and gender itself "structures". As a social structure, gender defines the different social norms and expectations of man and woman in a family. At the same time, we continuously take these gendered ideals to "do gender" and define what it means to be a man or a woman.

I hope that this study will cause us to question how we "do gender" when the normal gender structure is reversed. Do we find ways to continue gendered behavior? Do these fathers find ways to "masculinize" traditional "women's work"? Or do we shed gendered expectations, and perform the role as the role defines it? Do these fathers take on so-called feminine traits of nurturance and patience because these are qualities needed in childcare and housework?

I anticipate these findings will help us take another look at the families in the park and not be fazed by the presence of a man. By sharing the stories and experiences of stay-at-home fathers I hope that this study will contribute to the awareness and acceptance of varying family structures, so that one day there will be just as many men as women in the park with their children on a Wednesday afternoon.

Rationale

The concept of stay-at-home fathers and shared parenting is one that is relatively new to the realm of family. For centuries across cultures, men have been the breadwinners and the authority of the family. Economics, laws, and the media have all

contributed to the perpetuation of the traditional family ideal. Despite what laws and economics demand, the traditional family is not reality. The majority of families in the U.S. are in fact far from this ideal. The amount of research on varying family structures, especially stay-at-home fathers, is quite limited.

It was not until the 1980s that knowledge was spread about changing family structures and gender roles (Smith, 2009). The film "Mr. Mom" introduced the idea of stay-at-home dads to the mass media. This film portrays Michael Keaton as a father who loses his job and must stay home with his children once his wife goes back to work. Although the movie was a step towards the idea of stay-at-home dads, Keaton's portrayal was more of a slapstick comedy than a serious look into the life of a full-time father (Smith, 2009). The 2003 film "Daddy Day Care" tells a similar story. Eddie Murphy stars as the father who loses his job, and thus opens Daddy Day Care with his best friend. Daddy Day Care is more of a hectic zoo than a safe, nurturing place for children. Even today, the idea of stay-at-home fathers is not taken seriously. Furthermore, the portrayal of fatherhood in the media today is still limited to ideal types: the ideal breadwinner family man, or the deadbeat dad (Dienhart, 1998).

In recent years, stay-at-home fathers, shared parenting, and same-sex parenting has become much more of a reality. According to the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau, there are 143,000 married stay-at-home dads who stay home with their children aged 15 and younger. The same report says that 20% of married fathers stay at home with their preschoolers and 6% stays at home with grade-school children, while their spouse works full time. By the 1990s, only one in five families had a breadwinner father and a stay-at-

home mother (Coltrane, 1996). More and more families agree that it takes "more than one paycheck to support a family" (Coltrane, 1996).

Given the increase in the number of nontraditional family structures, a discourse must begin about their experiences, the lives of their children, and how their experiences affect the family as an institution and society as a whole. It is imperative that we gain a better understanding and awareness of these families, so that better economic and social supports can be given to these individuals and their children. Unfortunately, stay-at-home fathers have not been the subjects of substantial research to date. Our culture still holds the family to such a high, idealistic standard (Coltrane, 1996). We still define what it means to be a man or woman by the expectations and roles of fathers and mothers within the family. The concept of the family conceals the fact that families have always differed in their makeup (Coltrane, 1996). Through my work, I hope to demonstrate that what defines a man or a woman cannot be through rigid roles of fathers and mothers. This study will attempt to demonstrate how a man defines himself when his family does not fit the ideal mold.

My study will serve to illuminate the direct voices and experiences of these men. I will highlight the daily tasks, routines, and responsibilities of full-time fathers. My research, however, moves beyond the surface of their physical parental duties. I shed light on their emotions, feelings, and attitudes towards their parental duties. Through analysis of their parenting styles and their attitudes towards these duties, I attempt to delineate the different ways in which stay-at-home fathers construct masculinity.

My study deconstructs concepts that are so central to various institutions and social systems in our society: family, gender, and identity. We so often take our family

and gender identity for granted, because they are such abstract concepts bestowed upon us at birth. The process of gender begins before we are even born: parents paint a boy's bedroom blue, or a girl's room pink. This process continues in childhood through the different types of toys and activities that engage boys and girls. The media bombards children and adolescents with stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity. How can one even begin to define his or her own gender identity when images and ideas of what it means to be a man or woman are thrust in our faces from day one?

This study looks at individuals who do not conform to gender norms. Regardless of the circumstances behind their position, stay-at-home fathers turn traditional gender roles upside down. Through my research, I hope to take a critical look into their lives and what their nonconformist roles reveal about current definitions of gender in our society. Are the lines within gender beginning to blur? How much progress in gender equality has actually been made?

I also hope to raise awareness of the increase in stay-at-home fathers who are present in our society. Although the numbers may still be small, full-time fathers have much more of a presence than ever before. I hope that my research will demonstrate the positives of full-time fathering, both for the children, the spouse, and the father himself. If we can recognize the abilities of fathers to take on duties that are traditionally assigned to women, we can begin to break down rigid gender roles and expectations.

A greater awareness and acceptance of full-time fathers is necessary in order to bring about social and economic support for these families. Stay-at-home fathers lack sufficient formal and informal systems of help, advice, support, and counsel (Beer, 1983). Additionally, American fathers face a "Daddy Dilemma": while there is increasing

acceptance of working men and women participating in housework, fathers are still required to support their wife and children (Beer, 1983). Informal penalties in the workplace against men who stay home with their children must be lifted if the growth of shared parenting is to continue (Beer, 1983).

Raising consciousness about these families will open the public's eye to new childcare and parental support programs. We can look to other nations and emulate models that encourage shared parenting and full-time parenting in both genders. Sweden, for example, and has extensive programs of parental insurance and day care. There are voluntary parental training programs geared specifically towards fathers. Laws exist that give both parents the right to reduce their workday from eight to six hours. Young boys even attend child-care training classes in secondary schools (Beer, 1983). With more government and corporate policies in place to support parents, our culture can widen the possibilities for men and women to seek alternate family lifestyles that do not conform to traditional gender roles.

In a world where more mothers work full-time, where more gay and lesbian couples seek strategies to raise children, and where the divorce rate continues to rise, I hope to shatter some of the stereotypes that coincide with alternative parenting routes. I hope to show that shared and full-time parenting is a positive option for the children, the spouse, and the father himself. I aim to demonstrate that men are just as capable of "women's work" as mothers. Gender is not something that is innate in human beings; it is socialized roles, values, and expectations. Fathering and mothering are not inherent in us; they are learned behaviors. Just as a father can learn to become the breadwinner, so too can he learn to cook, clean, and nurture his children.

Literature Review

Although the empirical research on stay-at-home fathers is quite limited, there is significant literature about shared parenting and dual-income families. While shared parenting is quite different than full-time fathering, an understanding of this research will lay the groundwork for future study of stay-at-home fathers.

While the number of stay-at-home fathers is still small, most fathers partake in aspects of housework and child care. It is important to understand what types of tasks fathers complete, how often they do them, and under what circumstances do they share these duties. In a survey of 1515 respondents, men and women, Shelley Coverman set out to test three hypotheses: "1. The more resources a husband has, the less domestic labor he does. 2. The more traditional the husband's sex role attitudes, the less domestic labor he does. 3. The more domestic task demands on a husband and the greater his capacity to respond to them, the greater his participation in domestic labor" (Coverman, 1985). She found that number of children, number of hours spent at work outside the home, and spouse's employment status are the strongest predictors of husband's domestic labor time. This suggests that time availability plays the greatest factor in a husband's participation in childcare and housework.

William Beer's book Househusbands also suggests that time plays a large part in determining if and to what extent the husband shares domestic labor. He argues, "There is no implicit contradiction between being men and doing housework. The contradiction lies in excessive demands on a man's time imposed by his job" (Beer, 1983). In families where parenting is shared, time availability is a more important factor in dividing family work, with almost no regard to the type of housework or childcare required (Coltrane,

1997). The "time crunch" is the biggest obstacle in achieving shared parenting (Coltrane, 1997).

Other situational demands lead to conflicts with shared parenting. In the study "Can Men 'Mother'?", Barbara Risman reviewed responses to 141 questionnaires completed by single fathers. She concluded that men can in fact "mother", and do so quite successfully. Single fathers not only take responsibility for housework, but also spend considerable time with their children (Risman, 1986). This suggests that gender is not static and inflexible. "The situational demands of role requirements influence adult behavior and lead men to mother when they have no wives to depend on" (Risman, 1986).

Fathers who are most involved in parenting have flexible schedules. Involved fathers are also flexible in their views towards what work needs to be done. They reject a "rigid division between breadwinning and caretaking, [and] they also reject divisions in parenting itself" (Gerson, 1993). Despite their claims to equality, involved fathers shared parenting in varying degrees. In shared parenting families where the distinction between mothering and fathering is supposedly blurred, there emerge instead managing and helping roles (Coltrane, 1989). Mothers usually take on the role as manager, and fathers take on the role as helper. Managers decide what housework needs to be done and when it needs to be completed. Managers then delegate these tasks to the helpers. Helpers usually wait to be told what to do, rather than initiating household tasks on their own (Coltrane, 1989). Involved fathers are willing to do the work once they have been told what to do.

Gerson's concept of "mothers' helpers" is similar to the dichotomy between managers and helpers. "Mothers' helpers devote much time and energy to their children, but they avoid those activities that they deem least attractive" (Gerson, 1993). They justify their decisions by claiming that their wives have higher standards of cleanliness; so either the wife does more work to live up to her standards, or she has to live with conditions below her standards (Gerson, 1993). When fathers do want to help, women also have a difficult time giving up their authority over the housework and childcare (Coltrane, 1989).

In Halving it All, Francine Deutsch outlines three other types of involved fathers: sharers, helpers, and slackers. These categories suggest that there is a spectrum in the amount of work a father can do. The fact that there exist types of involved fathers, from sharers to slackers, demonstrates that progress has been made in equal parenting. Fifty years ago there was only one type of father: breadwinner.

Perhaps this progress is in part due to the overall satisfaction with shared parenting arrangements. Men report an "affinity for the rewards of housework itself, increased self-confidence and family solidarity, a feeling of doing what is morally right, and greater insight into the situation of women" (Beer, 1983). Across cultures, involved fathers report an increased satisfaction from feeling close and important to their children (Dienhart, 1998). Relations between married couples also improve as a result of shared parenting (Coltrane, 2000). Dividing work requires increased communication between partners. Furthermore, when the work is shared, there is considerably less stress and pressure on one parent to do it all.

The empirical research on shared parenting demonstrates that we are progressing towards more equal models of parenting. Studies of involved fathers and their spouses suggest that shared parenting is a desirable and viable option for families. This evidence strengthens my hunch that stay-at-home fathers are capable of taking on traditional, mothering roles. A man's ability to mother has less to do with gender, and more to do with the structural and situational demands placed upon him.

There has been some recent headway in the study of stay-at-home fathers. In 2006, Andrea Doucet conducted a qualitative study on 118 Canadian fathers who identified themselves as the primary caregiver for their children. Doucet argues that these fathers are "embodied subjects"; that is, they simultaneously create their social milieu and are shaped by their social location (Doucet, 2006). Her study set out to determine how as embodied subjects, stay-at-home fathers create and are shaped by the "estrogen-filled worlds" within which they live. She found that these men emphasize physical play with their children; they highlight the outdoors and an active approach to parenting; they emphasize sports and risk-taking; and they state that their experience as fathers is fundamentally different than that of mothers. Her findings begin to hint at the many ways in which stay-at-home fathers are influenced by and craft new definitions of masculinity. The ways in which stay-at-home fathers have come to create new gender identities in an "estrogen-filled world" demonstrates how they have avoided gendered binary meanings (Thorne, 1993).

T.S. Zimmerman's study on stay-at-home mother and stay-at-home father families further depicts the ways in which these men must reconceptualize gender identities. The men in stay-at-home father/career mother families stressed that they *chose*

their current arrangement because of the wife's salary and benefits (Zimmerman, 2000). Furthermore, in stay-at-home mother/breadwinner families, the mother stated that she saw her position as a long-term commitment and/or permanent. The fathers in stay-at-home father families, however, expressed uncertainty as to whether their current position would become a long-term commitment. Most stay-at-home fathers stated that they pictured themselves back in the workforce sometime in the future (Zimmerman, 2000). These results demonstrate the power of binary gender identities even in people who do not conform to them. It seems as though stay-at-home fathers feel compelled to justify their position as a rational choice or temporary, so as not to stray too far from wide held definitions of masculinity.

Masculinity is a topic about which much research has been done. In my study, I hope to discover how stay-at-home fathers define masculinity as they take on roles that are traditionally feminine. It will be helpful, therefore, to outline these traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Our society likes to believe that here is a true, fixed masculinity (Connell, 1995). This masculinity proceeds from the physical strength and power of men's bodies (Connell, 1995). In our culture, we regard the body as a "machine" that produces gender differences (Connell, 1995). Gender differences, therefore, seem to stem from inherent biological differences between the sexes. Furthermore, the belief that the body creates gender differences produces the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as the most powerful, absolute ideal of what it means to be a man (Connell, 1995). Think the Hollywood depiction of Clint Eastwood or John Wayne. However, very few, if any, men actually live up to this ideal. Despite the

unrealistic nature of hegemonic masculinity, the concept continues because it guarantees the domination of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is what has allowed men to dominate nearly all spheres of life and keep women in the home.

The men who I spoke with clearly rebel against hegemonic masculinity. In fact, they assume the ultimate feminine role: motherhood (Aulette, Whittner, & Blakely, 2008). How do these men conceive of gender when these traditional lines are blurred? What is the meaning of gender, and what is its role in society? Many theories exist, which argue gender is biological, psychological, sociological, or a combination of any and all of these.

Biological essentialism argues that basic differences in behaviors, personality, and orientation between men and women stem from their different biologies. Sandra Bem, an essentialist, argues that there are indisputable differences between men and women's bodies across cultures and history. These differences lead to the sexual division of labor: women were responsible for childcare, and men were responsible for defense and hunting (Bem, 1994). This division of labor produced sexually differentiated behaviors and a network of social practices and cultural beliefs (Bem, 1994).

Bem also developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The BSRI contains 60 different traits, such as "affectionate, inefficient, competitive, independent." Based on how many traits you associate with, you receive a score that indicates how "masculine" or "feminine" you are. This is obviously problematic: it assumes that gender can be defined by limited, stereotypical, and subjective characteristics. Furthermore, biological essentialism assumes androcentricism, or male-centeredness (Risman, 1998). That is, the

male experience is assumed as the normative or neutral experience, and the female experience is abnormal and inferior. Essentialism also leads to gender polarization (Risman, 1998). Gender differences that are believed to be biological will force cultural differences, which will only continue the sharp divide between genders.

Sex-role theory expands on essentialism. Under sex-role theory, being a man or a woman means acting in accordance to a set of expectations that are attached to one's sex (Connell, 1995). Talcott Parsons argued that men and women take on different roles based on their sex. Men assume instrumental roles, which relate to affairs external to the family. Women take on expressive roles, which relate solely to the stability and management within the family. Sex-role theory is obviously flawed. The distinction between instrumental and expressive roles is quite vague (Connell, 1995). Today, many men and women take on roles that are both instrumental and expressive. Furthermore, sex-role theory removes agency from the individual and inflates the degree to which social behavior is prescribed (Connell, 1995).

More psychological theories suggest that childhood is the most vital time in the construction of gender. Psychodynamic theorists argue that early childhood socialization is determinant of later gendered behavior. Reinforcement theorists, such as B.F. Skinner, also claim that young girls develop nurturing personalities because they are given praise for interest in dolls and babies, whereas boys are encouraged to roughhouse and be aggressive (Coltrane, 1996). Through a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, Nancy Chodorow argues that the relationship between an infant and the mother shapes later masculine and feminine personalities. Mothers relate to girl infants differently than to boys. Girls, therefore, develop personalities based on connectedness, whereas boys

develop personalities based on independence. Furthermore, boys must reject their mother in order to adopt masculinity, which causes them to reject femininity in themselves and in society (Chodorow, 1976).

These psychological theories are also limited in that they are too individualistic: they fail to look at the larger social systems and structures that shape gender. Sociological gender theories are much more holistic in scope. West and Zimmerman's theory of "doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West and Zimmerman, 1987). They draw on Goffman's concept of gender display to say that we "do gender" by acting according to "essential sexual natures"—masculinity and femininity (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is not inherent, but something that we constantly perform in order to live up to ideal definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Structural theorists take this even further and argue that gender itself is a social structure. Under structuralism, "human behavior, including family roles, is determined by the social context in which people live" (Risman, 1986). Lorber also argues that gender itself is a social institution; it is one of the first ways humans organize and identify themselves (1994). As a structure, gender has divided economic production outside the home and familial duties in the home (Lorber, 1994). Gender as a social structure serves many social functions (Lorber, 1994). Gender organizes processes that create gendered images and symbols; it creates gendered logic in work, family, and law; and it encourages gendered individual identity (Acker, 1992). As a social structure, gender continues to construct women as subordinates to men (Lorber, 1994).

The course of this study will be exploratory in that I hope to theorize about the nature of gender in an area about which little is known. I will ground my research in the theories of "doing gender" and structuralism. Gender is the first structure through which we organize and identify ourselves. From the minute a baby is born, he is given a blue cap if a boy, or a pink one for a girl. Gender serves to organize all other institutions from religion, to marriage, to the family. Within all of these institutions, the individual performs roles, behaviors, and tasks based on his or her gender.

In the family, mothers and fathers "do gender" as a way to define their individual roles as parents and also to identity themselves within society. In our society, motherhood and fatherhood embody the essence of the female and male experience. In order to claim this masculine or feminine experience, fathers and mothers "do gender" by performing the gendered roles associated with each. The process of "doing gender" perpetuates obsolete gender definitions through everyday actions and responsibilities of mothers and fathers, and the interactions between these two roles.

In light of this study I will ask, how do we "do gender" when the normal structure of these roles changes? Whatever this process may be I hope to show that men are capable of doing "women's work". Ultimately, I hope to suggest that gender is no more than a social structure through which we divide tasks and behaviors in order to define social norms.

Method and Variables

The units of analysis will be individual single fathers and stay-at-home dads. This group of people was somewhat difficult to find, so I identified the interviewees through snowball sampling (Babbie, 2002). I first spoke to a few students whose fathers stayed at

home, or who know of a relative/friend who stays at home with his children. Once I found a few fathers to interview, they referred me to friends who are also stay-at-home fathers, as so on. Our interactions first began via email. I explained who I am, what my study is about, and what to expect in our conversations. I gave as little specific details about my questions as possible, so that respondents could not prepare answers. I wanted real, honest answers. We then set up a time when I would call him on the phone for the actual interview.

I spoke with 13 men who define themselves as stay-at-home fathers. For the sake of this study, a stay-at-home father is the parent who is the primary caregiver of his children. Stay-at-home fathers may work part-time or work for home, but they are primarily responsible for everyday childcare and household duties.

The interviews ran from 45 minutes to over an hour. All of the interviews were conducted over the phone. Ideally I would have liked to conduct the interviews face-to-face, so that I could get a better sense of body language, facial expression, and hidden meanings in their words. However, this was not feasible given the amount of time and resources available for this study. Respondents were from Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York, New Hampshire, the greater Boston area, and even Japan. It would have been nearly impossible for me to complete all of these interviews face-to-face in the short time span available. Unlike face-to-face interviews, I realize that my phone conversations limited my findings only to their words and inflection; I was not be able to see facial expressions or body language (Babbie, 2002).

I believe that in-depth interviews best helped to get to the heart of their attitudes and personal sense of gender identity. The variables to be measured are somewhat

abstract and unique to the individual's experience. Therefore, I chose qualitative interviews, because this did not restrict the subjects in their responses (Babbie, 2002). The open-ended format of my questions allowed the subjects to elaborate on the questions in whatever way it relates to them (Babbie, 2002).

I used an interview guide that formatted the structure and flow of the interview. The interview questions outlined in Deutsch and Coltrane's individual studies on shared parenting families helped to frame a backbone for the flow and structure of my questions (1999 and 1996). I began with basic questions, such as: how many children do you have? Do you work outside the home? How many hours a day are you at home with the children? I was careful not to weight the responses to these questions to heavily, for the existing literature suggests that men tend to over report and women will underreport the amount of time spent with children and on housework (Shelton & John, 1996). Then I moved into more personal questions about how they feel towards their parental duties. What are the difficulties? What brings them joy? Then I shifted into more abstract questions about masculinity and their sense of being a "man" while performing traditional "women's work." The interview guide served only as the backbone for the interview itself. If the conversation naturally flowed into a discussion of questions planned later in the guide, I allowed the interviewee to continue with his thoughts (Babbie, 2002). I believe that these interviews served not only for my research purposes, but also as an outlet for these men to voice their unique stories.

Although the method of my research is qualitative there are several variables, or topics of discussion, I hope to analyze. They are: how these men came to be stay-at-home fathers, parental duties, parental/housework schedules and routines, strength of

relationship with children, strength of relationship with spouse, overall satisfaction, and masculinity.

Parental duties are the usual responsibilities, tasks, strategies, and routines taken to care for the family and the household. Parental duties include activities such as food shopping, preparing meals, providing transportation for the children, caring for the children when sick, planning activities for the children, etc. I measured this variable through a series of questions beginning with: Walk me through a typical day. What is the first thing you do, and what is the last thing you do before bed? I also measured this variable through tasks that are usually done by women: cooking, cleaning, and childcare. I asked how much time the individual puts into each of these activities on a daily basis. I also asked if and how often these duties are shared with his spouse.

I am interested not only in what these men do, but how they perform. The variable parental/housework schedules and routines will serve to measure how stay-at-home fathers perform these duties. I hope to find out their approach to completing tasks and solving problems. To measure this variable I presented interviewees with a case example and ask how they would respond in the situation. For example: your in-laws are visiting and you still need to clean the bathrooms and prepare dinner for the night. Your child is home sick with the flu and needs your attention. How would you react in this situation? Walk me through your thought process. What would you do to make sure you get everything done?

Strength of relationship with children was measured both through survey-type and more open-ended questions. Such survey questions will include: how many hours do you spend with your child each day? How much physical contact do you have with your

children? What activities do you do with your children on a daily basis? How often does your child come to you for emotional support? The open-ended questions included: what emotions do you feel when you are physically close to your children? What are your thoughts and feelings about your children when you are not with them? Do you believe that your own happiness and well being is intrinsically linked to that of your children?

Strength of relationship with spouse is defined by the relative amount of communication, problem-solving skills, and general sense of closeness between the husband and his spouse. To measure this variable I asked: How many times to do you talk to your spouse a day? What is your most common form of communication (phone, email, text message)? What do you talk about in these conversations? Is it primarily about housework and family business, or do you talk about unrelated topics as well? Do you and your spouse ever argue about childcare and housework? If so, how do you resolve these arguments? How do you and your spouse decide who is responsible for what tasks? Does one of you have more responsibility or authority in delegating and managing these tasks? How emotionally connected do you feel with your partner? Do you feel that the closeness of your relationship has changed at all since the start of your current family arrangement?

Satisfaction is defined by how happy, content, and secure these men feel with their current position. This variable attempts to measure the thoughts, feelings, and emotions evoked during typical parental duties. Such attitudes may include pride, compassion, frustration, resentment, etc. To measure satisfaction I asked broad, general questions in order to avoid limiting the way people describe their unique experiences. I asked, for example, what is your general mood when performing these tasks? Are there

certain tasks that put you in better moods than others? What thoughts run through your head when you are cooking a meal or driving your children to school?

Masculinity will be defined by how these men conceptualize themselves as men within the gendered norms, expectations, and roles of society. In other words, how these men see themselves fitting in, or not fitting in, as a man. Since this variable is more abstract than the others, I began by asking questions about the subject's own father. What were your father's responsibilities in the family when you were a child? What were the expectations of your own father, as put in place by your family? Then I used our discussion of his own father to relate to his current position. Are his responsibilities similar or different to your own responsibilities as a father? Did your father's role as a parent have any affect on your present role? Once a broad discussion about gendered roles and expectations began, I progressed into a more direct conversation about masculinity. Questions included: what was your idea of "being a man" when you were growing up? What did a "man" look like? How did he act? What was his job? How do you define "being a man" now? What does he look like, how does he act, what is his job? Do you see yourself as "being a man"? If your idea of a "man" has changed over the years, how has this changed and what may have caused this?

The variables in this study are unique in two ways. First, these variables are not easily quantified (Babbie, 2002). Satisfaction and masculinity are more abstract concepts, which cannot be measured by numbers. Second, these variables remain somewhat vague. Using these concepts as variables, proved to be somewhat of a challenge when developing operational, cogent definitions. I realize, therefore, that my definitions of satisfaction and masculinity are somewhat biased by my own

understanding of the terms. I do believe, however, that the relative ambiguity of these variables will allow for freedom of personal interpretation in the responses (Babbie, 2002).

Findings

Each interview was unique and interesting in its own way. I had no formula or model to follow. I did use an extensive interview guide; but it was just that: a guide. I used these questions to get at the major topics I hoped to discuss, but I did not follow it religiously. I let each interview follow its own course, and encouraged respondents to elaborate on whatever subjects they desired. In fact, when contacting respondents about the interviews, I used the term "conversation", rather than "interview". I hoped that this more conversational and informal tone, would help build rapport with respondents, and also foster more open, honest, and insightful responses.

It is difficult to go through this data and count the number of "yes's' or "no's" to a particular question. It is also unfair and impossible to compare or rank the varied experiences of the responses. This data, however, is truly qualitative in that it cannot be viewed simply as hard data, but as the personal stories and lived experiences of individual stay-at-home fathers. In the following section, I hope to not only illuminate and bring together major themes and common threads in their stories, but also to let their voices be heard and speak for themselves.

I. *How did I get here?*

Most conversations began with a discussion of how and why he became a stay-at-home father. A few respondents jumped into the topic without me even asking the question. "So you're probably going to ask why I'm a stay-at-home dad?" or "Well, it all

started when…" they would say. Most respondents described their journey to stay-at-home fatherhood as a narrative. They were careful to point out the ages of their children, the year they started to stay at home, and any significant moves or career changes that were part of this story.

> "Well I have two kids, they're 19 and 22. My wife has had five different careers since the birth of our first child…I was writing for the Washington Post when our first child was born. A year later we moved to San Francisco…After the birth of our second child, my wife was offered a position in the Netherlands, so we moved there for a about a year. Once we moved back to the U.S. and our kids started school, my wife was offered another job in Belgium… We lived there for two years, and then moved back to California. Shortly thereafter, my wife's company merged with another in D.C. Our kids were in 5th grade and 3rd grade then. We moved to D.C. and have been there ever since." (Denis, Washington, D.C.)

The attention to detail and eagerness with which respondents recounted their histories, almost sounded rehearsed or routine. It became clear that I was not the first person to ask why he became a stay-at-home father. The detailed narratives of their family history sounded like a prepared spiel that they have given several times before. This prepared spiel suggests that these men have had to explain their situation before. A full-time working father would most likely not have to explain why he works, because it is just assumed that the father works. Stay-at-home fathers, however, are relatively new and unusual. It is possible that these fathers have had to explain or justify their nonconformity in the past.

It is also possible that the newness and strangeness of stay-at-home fathers' situation affected the responses they gave throughout our conversations. If these men have had to justify or explain their experiences before, it is possible that they may have tailored their responses based on these previous conversations. Rather than thinking about and giving original responses, respondents could have given me answers they have

already used before. Based on the level of insight, depth, and personal stories shared, however, I strongly believe that these men gave original, honest responses. Some of their stories and thoughts were so raw and honest that it seems highly unlikely they prepared such responses.

Beyond *how* these men told their stories, there were also similarities in *what* they told. Almost all men described the decision to become a stay-at-home father as a progression or evolution. In fact, no formal decision was truly made. Rather, becoming a stay-at-home father "just happened", "just seemed natural", "it just made sense".

> "I don't know if it was ever decided that I would stay at home full time. It was more like an evolution. There was never a formal decision, it was more ad hoc It just made sense for me to stay at home, and it worked." (Edward, Westchester, NY)

> "It all started as an exploration. There was no definite beginning or end to it. It was just something that happened naturally, I guess…We tried it, it worked, and we saw no reason to change things." (Johnny, Los Angeles).

> "We didn't plan this way ahead. It was like a natural thing. It wasn't hard to figure out. It just made sense." (Michael, NH).

Respondents listed a whole host of reasons why "it just made sense" for them to stay at home. Financial reasons, a personality fit, and the flexibility of his schedule all factored into the progression and evolution to stay-at-home fatherhood.

Financial Reasons

Almost all respondents claimed that finances played a role in the decision for him to stay at home. In many of the families, the mother had a full-time job with a higher income and better benefits. A few of the fathers noted that if they were to work full-time, they would only be making enough money to cover the cost of daycare; so instead of

working to pay for daycare, it made more sense, financially and emotionally, to stay at home with the children.

> "We were both working full-time when we had our first child. We tried it for a couple years. But when we had our second child two years later, we realized it was just too much to juggle…She was bringing in most of our income at the time, so it wasn't hard to figure out that I would stay at home." (Michael, NH).

> "Our finances played a big part in the way our family structure evolved. I was working as a real estate consultant from home after the birth of our first daughter. I had a bunch of bad real estate deals, so I was actually losing money from working. My wife was making a steady income at her job as an editor. So I was actually hurting our income by working." (Edward, NY).

> "I was doing legal research, and my wife was already a full-time attorney when we had our first child. We both kept working for the next four years…She was obviously making more money than me, and we realized I was making just enough money to cover the cost of daycare for our two kids. So the primary reason was financial, but I was also really eager and happy to stay at home with the kids." (Mark D., MA).

> "My wife has always worked full-time. She loved her job…she works in financial services…and I hated mine. We both couldn't really handle the thought of sending our kids to daycare...We talked about it. She loved her job and made more money. It would've cost more for me to work, and we figured we wouldn't be any worse off if I stayed at home. Finances played a role, but at the end of the day, we wanted someone home with the kids, and it just made sense that I would do it." (Mark B., MA).

Over and over again, respondents said, "it just made sense" for me to stay at home. This decision was not about who made a more loving and caring parent; it was about who makes enough money so that they could financially and emotionally support their children.

Interests and Personality

Several of the fathers also claimed that being a stay-at-home dad was something that they wanted or felt well suited to do. Many felt that they possess qualities that are important in raising children, such as patience and an easygoing attitude.

> "There were some personality considerations in figuring this out. We both thought I was better suited to stay at home. I'm more patient with things, in general. I also have a high tolerance for boredom, so I'm good at doing the repetitive things kids want to do, or the tasks involved with housework." (Willy, NY).

A few fathers also discussed their disinterest in the full-time workforce. These men held jobs that had little to do with their passions and felt more like a chore than anything else. They saw full-time parenting as a break from that routine and a chance to try something completely new and exciting.

> "I hated my job as a production manager…Once I stopped working to stay at home with the kids, I felt a lot better about myself. I gained a much better sense of self-worth from being at home than when I was working. I really feel like this helped me find myself…like it was my calling." (Johnny, LA).

> "I've always had an issue with outside work…I have a conflicted attitude towards work ambitions in our society. Staying at home fit my character well. I didn't have to deal with the pressures and expectations that come with the working culture." (Michael, NH).

At the same time, respondents stated that their wives were passionate about their careers and had no desire to suddenly give that up.

> "My wife grew up with a lot of personal issues that gave her this idea that she should work outside the home. Her father died when she was very young. She [his wife's mother] remarried a couple years later, and she worked full-time as a nurse during all of this. Her mother died when she was still a young child. Then her stepfather died when she was eleven. So she grew up thinking that parents aren't permanent, and that she couldn't rely on a husband, or anyone for that matter, to take care of her forever…It's pretty tragic, but it made her a strong woman. A woman who had no desire to give up her career to stay at home." (Aldo, Japan).

> "I knew that my wife always wanted to work before we even married. Her career aspirations were always clear, and mine, well…I didn't really have any career aspirations laid out (laughs)…So for her to stay at work, and for me to stay at home was just natural. It fit us." (Michael, NH).

These responses demonstrate that there was a role reversal not only in the work of these men and women, but also in their expectations and personalities. For many of the fathers,

staying at home fit with their interests and persona; whereas if his wife were to stay at home it would have been out of her character. This observation lends to question the notion of a "maternal instinct". Respondents believe that while their wives wanted to have children, they did not desire to stay at home as women have traditionally done. Respondents claimed their wives chose to pursue their own career aspirations and take on the role as breadwinner. This suggests that socialization and personality, not biology, factor into how we construct parenting roles.

It is important to note, however, that I did not speak with the mothers in these families. I have no valid or true understanding of how these working mothers felt about their decision to work. It is also possible that respondents claimed their wives did not want to stay at home as a way of justifying his position. Because stay-at-home fathers are still seen as unusual in the scheme of family history, respondents may have felt a need to defend or rationalize this identity by claiming that this was something that both the mother and father wanted, even if that is not necessarily true. While I cannot claim that the respondents' words fit the actual behaviors of their wives, what I do know is how these fathers explained themselves. Respondents' explanations clearly draw from the cultural narratives about personality and household divisions of labor.

Flexibility of Schedule

Flexibility and time are themes consistent not only in the stories of why individuals became stay-at-home fathers, but also in the entirety of their experiences. "Not having enough time" and "trying to find more time" are phrases that came up consistently in the majority of the interviews. Many men cited the flexibility of their work schedule, or not working at all, was another factor in why they stayed at home.

Most of the men who had a job while being a stay-at-home dad, either worked part-time, worked from home, or held a job that allowed them to pick his own hours.

> "My wife works at a women's health clinic, where she works 13-hour shifts. Her shifts are randomly assigned, so she doesn't have my control over when she works. I work part-time as an electrician, so I can choose the hours when I'm available…It was a lot easier for us just to assume that I would be the primary caregiver for our kids." (Bob, MA).

> "I was driving freight 11PM to 7AM when we had our first daughter. My wife always worked during the day. So even though we were both working, we just sorta fell into this pattern, where I was the primary parent, simply because I was the one that was there during the hours when the kids were awake." (Paul, MA).

> "I've always considered myself a work-at-home dad, not a stay-at-home dad. Even though I've always been home 24/7 with the kids, I've always worked at the same time…I'm a writer. Recently I've been writing mini-cookbooks that I post on my website…Even though some days get really hectic, I always try to find sometime to steal away and write…when they're taking a nap, or on a play date. I'm lucky that I don't need to be in an office to do work." (Bruce, MA).

> "I actually worked full time up until 9/11. I was an airline pilot, so I was usually gone 15 to 19 days a month. Well after 9/11 I was laid off, and my wife went back to work as a pharmacy technician to support our family. She works Monday through Friday, 10 to 5. Her hours are pretty set in stone…Through a government connection, I now work for Homeland Security. I was also pretty lucky in that I got to choose my hours. So I work four days a week, from 1AM to noon. That way I'm there for most of the time when my wife is at work." (Dan, D.C.)

> "We've been all over the place for my wife's job. As a writer, I could pretty much pick up and work wherever we went. I was working on a novel when my kids where younger, but that was work that I could leave and pick up later if my kids needed something. Now that they're off in college, I volunteer some and teach creative writing at the public school nearby." (Denis, D.C.)

The flexibility of their schedules allowed for greater availability and tolerance of the many tasks and circumstances that are involved with parenting. For these families it was most important to have someone there for the children, regardless if that person was the mother or the father.

Finances, personality, and flexibility are just a few of the many unique reasons why these men became stay-at-home fathers. Almost all of these men claimed that there was never a formal decision for him to stay at home. Rather it was an arrangement that naturally progressed and evolved in order to meet the practical and emotional demands of raising a family. Furthermore, none of these respondents cited their sex as a consideration in becoming a stay-at-home father. While the topic of gender came up later in most conversations, none of the fathers mentioned his sex as a deciding or inhibiting factor to stay at home full-time.

II. ***What does it mean to be a Stay-at-Home-Father?: Parental Duties***

There is a whole industry in this country aimed towards mothers. Books, magazines, movies, and classes sell the promise of how to be a good mother: what to feed your children, what to read to your children, how to get them to be active. But where are the guidebooks and magazines on how to be a good father? There are support groups and some literature out there, but it is certainly not an industry in itself as mothering has become. So how are stay-at-home fathers supposed to figure out what and how to raise a family and keep a household when they haven't been raised or taught to do so?

Well, the men that I spoke with seem to do just fine. None of them mentioned any reservations about taking on household and parental responsibilities. These duties were something they dove into head first, and just hoped to figure out along the way. Most respondents claimed they did pretty much anything and everything related to childcare and housework.

> "In the mornings the kids and I would help mom get ready for work. Then I would get them ready for preschool. I'd make them breakfast and dress them. Then we all went to preschool. They went to a CO-OP preschool, so I actually worked here, and was with them during the day…On other days we would go to

> the playground and do other kid activities. I always do all the cooking. I do the food shopping, I'll clean the house, and do the laundry." (Johnny, L.A.)
>
> "I did everything that you would expect a stay-at-home mother to do. I did all the cooking, and most of the cleaning around the house. I took the kids to the doctor. I fed them, bathed them, clothed them. I was their primary caregiver. My wife and I were the caricature of a role reversal." (Michael, N.H.)
>
> "I was responsible for preparing meals, doing the laundry, cleaning the house, buying groceries. It was nothing different than what most moms do…I volunteered at my kids' school, took them to the playground. The other moms actually called me 'Mr. Mom'". (Mark Baron, MA).

In addition to performing these traditionally more feminine tasks, almost all respondents were also responsible for more masculine tasks. Such tasks include mowing the lawn, shoveling, fixing things, and helping children build projects.

> "I did all the cooking and laundry. I also did all the things your typical dad would do, like mowing the lawn…Whereas my kids usually went to my wife for emotional support, they came to me with practical problems. Like if something was broken, or they needed help with a school problem, or practicing their instruments." (Bruce, MA).
>
> "Both my wife and I did the dishes and laundry. I did all the outdoor stuff, like shoveling and mowing. She did the vacuuming and cleaned the bathrooms. She hates being outside, and I love it, so I'm happy to do that kinda stuff." (Bob, MA).
>
> "I love to cook, so it was no problem for me to do that. But wife always did all the cleaning…I got the kids ready for school. I took them to the park, coached their sports teams." (Paul, MA).

Coinciding with these traditionally masculine tasks, many fathers also made an emphasis on physical activity and playing sports with their children.

> "I took them on bike rides all the time. I'd ask them where they wanted to go, and let them lead the way…We went to the beach and the park a lot. I always wanted to be doing something with them that was active. I'm just an active person." (Bruce, MA).
>
> "We played *a lot* of games. We played sports together. I let them run around. We went different places. This get-up-and-go approach seemed to work for them too…Everyday was different. There were no real routines." (Denis, D.C.)

> "Being involved with the kids' sports really helped form a connection between us. I went to all their games, and they knew I was always there to support them. I also think my involvement in sports led to a greater acceptance of me as a stay-at-home dad in the community. I could tell that the other moms liked having me around the playground to teach their kids sports. It was like I evened things out." (Paul, MA).

> "I took the kids hiking. I was their baseball coach. I actually ran the entire baseball league. If was working, I wouldn't've had that time to do those things, and I think my kids really liked having me there and being involved." (Mark B., MA).

Other studies on stay-at-home fathers also reveal that men emphasize physical activity and sport as a way not only to interact with their children, but also as a way to construct masculine identities. In a qualitative study Canadian fathers who self-defined themselves as the primary caregiver, the majority of respondents mentioned described themselves as "strong, physical, and active beings" (Doucet, 2006). They also stressed outdoor activities with their children and being involved with their children's sports teams (Doucet, 2006). In another study of both working and stay-at-home fathers, most of the men emphasized doing work on the house, carpentry, woodworking, and car repairs (Doucet, 2004). It seems as though these men accentuate traditional masculine activities, such as sports and physical labor, as a way to alleviate the discomfort and insecurity that might come with giving up breadwinning (Doucet, 2004).

In the book Power at Play, Michael Messner argues that sports shape masculine values, rituals, and relationships. Sports are a social institution, in that the values and trends change with the historical context (Messner, 1992). In the 1950s, for example, most men went away to work and women stayed at home with the children. This meant that young boys were raised and socialized by women. The growing popularity of

organized sports during this time demonstrates the fear of a feminized society. Sports were meant to instill masculine values in the absence of a father (Messner, 1992).

Sports are doubly important during boyhood, because is this the time when young boys learn "how to become men" (Messner, 1990). Many men reflect on childhoodl sports and claim that it was a "natural" thing for them to do (Messner, 1990). But how natural is it to pick up a bat and swing at a ball, or jump and shoot a ball through a hoop? Sports are not instinctual; they are socialized (Messner, 1990). Sex-segregated activities, which begin in childhood, serve to shape gendered identities and "gendered cultures" (Messner, 1990). Through the process of interaction that occurs during sports, young boys develop a masculine identity (Messner, 1990).

Most of the fathers in this study grew up during the 1950's and 1960's. While we did not talk specifically about their involvement in sports as children, respondents did say they were raised in traditional gendered family settings. Almost all of their fathers were the breadwinners. Some respondents also reminisced about playing sports with their fathers and brothers on the weekends. As Messner argues, it is possible that sports were also used in respondents' families as a way to cultivate masculine identities. My findings also resonate with the findings of Doucet and Messner, in that these stay-at-home fathers emphasized sports and outdoor labor as a way to hold onto and construct a masculine identity when performing traditionally feminine behaviors.

Formal and Informal Divisions of Labor

When asked how all of these duties were divided between mother and father, most respondents claimed that there was no formal division and that he took on most, if not all, childcare and household responsibilities. Fathers seemed adamant to express that they

were heavily involved in parenting, despite the cultural belief that fathers are unattached, unavailable, and uninvolved.

> "The duties were split 50/50 between us. I was very into making sure that things were fair, and that my wife didn't feel like she was still responsible for all the parenting and housework stuff when she came home at the end of the day." (Bob D., MA)

> "There wasn't anything that I didn't do. I looked forward to everyday, waiting to see how it would unfold, and what my kids wanted to do next…There's no way my wife and I could've divided tasks and roles. That would've been asinine. It was just that I was there, so I did what we need to do." (Mark D., MA).

> "Figuring out who does work is always a work in progress. There can't be set boundaries about who's responsible for what, because you never know what will come up…It was never like 'ok I'll do this because I'm the mom, and you'll do this because you're the dad'. It was just assumed that I could and would do everything a stay-at-home mom would do because I was the one who was there." (Dan, D.C.)

It seems that most men made a point to stress their high level of involvement as a way to demonstrate their excitement, willingness, and ability to take on a demanding parenting role. Several fathers made a point to say that this was never something they felt like they had to do; but rather an opportunity that they welcomed with open arms.

> "I was very content to do something new. Me staying home not only opened up job opportunities for my wife, but was an opportunity for myself." (Denis, D.C.)

> "I jumped at the chance to be able to stay at home. It was never a question." (Dan, D.C.)

Despite their excitement and willingness to assume a full-time parenting role, there were still certain tasks that were clearly delineated to the mother or the father. Such tasks seem to align with typical gendered duties. Most men claimed they do all of the outdoor labor. A few respondents also said they do less of the laundry and cleaning, because their ability to perform such tasks did not live up to their wives' expectations.

> "My wife doesn't do any of the outdoor stuff. I do all of that. And I enjoy it. She does all the indoor cleaning. I tried to help, but she actually banned me from doing laundry, because I couldn't do it the way she liked it." (Mark D., MA).

A few men also cited physical differences as a reason for how labor was divided.

> "My level of stamina and strength may have affected the practical experience. For example, we live in an apartment, so I'm always carrying the kids or their strollers up and down the stairs. I also do a lot of walking and pushing them around in the city. Not that my wife couldn't do those things, but it would be a lot more exhausting for her, simply because she's not as strong as me." (Willy, NY).

> "My wife wouldn't be able to handle some of the yard work I do. She just doesn't have the build for it. And she has no interest in it." (Mark D., MA)

Respondents also repeatedly cited personality and interests as factors in determining parental duties. For the men who said they do the majority of outdoor labor, they reasoned that they just enjoy being outside and doing physical labor, while their wives just had no interest. Men do not hold the belief that women are incapable of doing such physical labor, but that their wives as individuals just have other interests. Such interests dictate the different types of activities mothers do with their children, versus what the fathers do. Where many of the fathers said they enjoyed playing games and sports with their children, respondents claim that their wives do activities such as crafts or read with them.

> "The kids would always go to my wife for help with English homework and writing papers. She always read with them, even after she worked all day long." (Bob, MA)

> "My wife always spent 'quiet time' with the kids. She was always able to settle them down, and she helped them learn how to read. She was just better at it." (Mark D., MA)

> "Who did what tasks was mostly a function of personality and who has time. I did all the cooking, because I enjoy it. My wife would do things like brush the girls' hair and take them shopping. It's not that I didn't do it if I needed to, but she was just better at it." (Edward, NY).

Parental duties were divided not only in practical tasks, but also in emotional support for their children. Despite the fact that these fathers spent more time with their children, many respondents felt that their children still went to their mother with emotional problems.

> "Every kid has a different relationship with their parents, and that strengthens them as a person. Different needs are satisfied by different parents…My kids would usually go to my wife for emotional support. If something was bothering them, I think they felt more comfortable opening up to her, even though I was more in tune with what was going on in their everyday lives." (Bruce, MA)

> "My wife is better at talking through things. I'm less patient. I liked to just find a solution and move on. I think the kids pick up those differences, and that's why they'd go to her for a lot of their emotional problems." (Mark B., MA)

> "Joanie is a better analyst than me. She's better at looking at and reading a situation, and then figuring out the right thing to do. I usually defer all the emotional decision-making to her." (Aldo, Japan)

> "Even though she was working, my wife still maintained the 'mommy role'. The kids were still just most comfortable with her talking about things. My emotional relationship with them was definitely strengthened by being home, but Lisa still had the greater emotional influence. I think that was because of her personality and her gender. She's just an understanding person in general, but I also think women are better at this than men. They just have more tolerance and comfort in working through things. Men just want to solve the problem and move on." (Edward, NY)

Although these men identify personality and interests as reasons for divisions of emotional labor, it seems that these interests do not form independently, but are shaped by one's gender. Regardless of the fact that these men took on an untraditional role as stay-at-home father, their interests and actions are still influenced by traditional gender norms. This speaks to the great degree too which gender structures the motions of everyday life.

Furthermore, why is it that these fathers seem unable to emotionally connect with their children in the same way that their wives do, even though they spend more time

with them? The literature suggests that emotions are a shaky territory for men to handle. In childhood, boys are socialized to avoid expression of vulnerable emotions (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005). They learn that a masculine identity means extreme stoicism, and that showing strong emotions brings shame (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005). Young boys are encouraged to fear emotions and react to shame with avoidance or aggressive behaviors (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005). Masculinity promotes "restrictive emotionality" (Jansz, 2000). To be a man is to strive for autonomy, achievement, aggression, and stoicism, which ultimately means a man must control pain, grief, and other vulnerable feelings (Jansz, 2000). These stay-at-home fathers claim that their wives are better at handling the emotional problems of their children. It seems, however, that the women may not be naturally better, but that the men have been socialized to distance themselves from emotion as a way of constructing masculinity.

Perhaps the most telling and the most common reasons for labor divisions are time and availability. In most interviews, respondents reported that who did what was dictated not by formal arrangements or special abilities, but by who is most readily available at the time that the task needs to be completed. Many of the fathers claimed that families simply do not have the time to worry about who is responsible for what; it is most important that the task be completed, regardless of who does it.

> "We don't really have clearly delineated duties. It's really about whoever has the most time at that moment." (Johnny, LA)

> "Logistically, it was really hard at first. Trying to figure out how to do everything. But I think it's the same situation for a stay-at-home mom. It's not about who's better at doing these kinda things. You just need to figure out how to get it all done." (Bob, MA)

> "It was so stressful at first, trying to balance working nights and being with my kids during the day. Sometimes I would only get 1 hour of sleep. But you just take a deep breath and get through it. You have to." (Paul, MA)
>
> "Our parental duties weren't divided formally, but by the demands of our schedules. Her professional schedule was very demanding, so I had to make myself available to the kids around that." (Willy, NY)
>
> "We're both busy people, so it's just about who's available. It's really a shared responsibility." (Dan, D.C.)
>
> "You think you have things all figured out, and then you add a kid to the equation. It's never linear again. Things always come up, and you have to be ready to take it on, regardless of what it is." (Bruce, MA)

Similar to the reasons behind why these men became stay-at-home fathers, it seems that time and flexibility play a major role in determining which parent is responsible for which duties. When there is a division of labor, gender may play some part in dividing up these tasks. Overall, however, almost all fathers said that they were willing to take on any task demanded as a stay-at-home dad. Men do not have any reservations towards certain duties because they are traditionally seen as "feminine". These stay-at-home fathers dove into their responsibilities head first, and did whatever needed to be done for the wellbeing of their children.

III. *Parenting Styles*

Perhaps even more telling than what stay-at-home fathers do is *how* they do. Without direct questioning, most fathers dove into a discussion of their parenting style and philosophy. If the respondent did not address this topic directly, almost all fathers demonstrated their parenting styles through examples of how they dealt with family conflicts.

"Let them get their hands dirty"

Almost all fathers stressed that they took an experiential approach to parenting. Being a full-time parent was a learning experience for both the fathers and their children. Stay-at-home fathers need to learn to deal with situations as they come. There is no handbook on how to be a stay-at-home dad; and even if there were respondents suggest that there is no way you can prepare for the types of situations one will encounter.

As a result, many fathers described themselves as being fairly laidback, open-minded, and flexible when it comes to parenting. Children were often given an autonomous role. Respondents viewed their children as individuals with emotions and desires that should be celebrated. Fathers repeatedly said their children often set the agenda for the day. At the same time, fathers were not afraid to let their children make mistakes or get their hands dirty. Most fathers viewed their laidback, flexible approach as beneficial to the child's sense of independence and self-expression.

> "The CO-OP school where the kids went helped to teach them how to resolve conflict and express feelings. The kids set the agenda for what they would do everyday at school…They were given autonomy within limits…It was a very nonjudgmental, non-shaming place…I really tried to continue that philosophy in my own parenting with them. If they were upset or throwing a tantrum I would let them cry it out, until they kinda came out of it and were able to figure it out on their own." (Johnny, LA)

> "I really believe in a system of experiential learning for the kids. Both my wife and I, tried to teach them the correct principles, but let them govern themselves. I would let them do what they wanted to do, but that also meant I would let them fall. It worked in different ways for each one of our kids, but overall they learn their own limits and build self-confidence." (Aldo, Japan).

> "I'm more of the laidback type. I always let them try something if that was what they wanted to do. And then if they weren't having fun anymore or didn't want to do it, we didn't. It took a while to figure this out…not to push them. The more you try to push one way, they more they'll push the other…To be at home and see everything that they were going through really helped to understand why they would do certain things. It helped me to be more patient and flexible with them." (Paul, MA).

> "I never tried to push anything on them. I exposed them to different things, like bike riding and drawing, but I let them take out of it what they wanted…I like to be involved and know what's going on in their lives, but not in that 'helicopter parent' type mode." (Bruce, MA)

> "We believe in teaching them right versus wrong and putting them on the right path, but we let them make mistakes. When they were younger we need to set boundaries, because safety is an obvious concern. But as they got older, we started to let the reins loose…I have a more advice-based model, where I give suggestions but I realize I can't control their decisions." (Dan, D.C.)

Increased Communication and Emotional Relationship

Respondents who described this experiential, laidback approach also believe that they have strong communication skills with their children. Most fathers claim that their children feel comfortable relying on them and talking to them about emotional issues. Many respondents also stated having a better sense of understanding with their children because they were able to spend more time with them. Most fathers said they were thrilled they had the opportunity to spend such time and build such relationships with their children. Some fathers also believed that they would not have been as close with their children had they been working full time.

> "Being a stay-at-home dad made us so close now…Their business is my business." (Michael, NH)

> "When you're home full time, the kids just plug into you. We were able to build a very strong relationship…I really tried to get my kids involved in communicating as a family. We always ate dinner together at the table, played games together…Spending time with your family is how to learn to deal with things in the real world. Spending time with them will, I hope, give them valuable communication and people skills." (Bob, MA)

> "We had talks and stuff. Dads that aren't home with their kids don't get that. If we had arguments, we would talk it out. If there was a problem, I'd try to keep it cool, try to comfort them, try to keep them talking. And more often than not, we worked it out." (Paul, MA)

> "Staying at home helped my communication and relationships with my children. It improved the quality of life of my kids and myself. I would do it all again in a

> heartbeat. I feel like I did the right thing. I never felt like I was making a sacrifice for my kids, and I think they look up to me and respect me for that." (Mark B., MA)
>
> "I was there for their emotional needs, because I was the one at home. I think they felt more comfortable with me than if I was working." (Johnny, LA)
>
> "I think I'm just as sensitive to their emotional needs as my wife. I'm no less capable of being a loving parent, and I have just-as-good, if not better, relationships with my children than some stay-at-home mothers might." (Dan, D.C.)

These responses suggest that increased communication and closeness with children is a result of the amount time together. Because these stay-at-home fathers were more physically available to their children, they also became more emotionally available. Physical closeness breeds emotional closeness and understanding. This is to say that men and women are both capable of building emotional relationships with their children. It is not a matter of gender, but a matter of who is available to be there for the children.

Perceived Mother's Relationship with Children

Despite the fact that many fathers felt they were closer with their children as a result of spending more time with them, most respondents expressed the belief that their wives were just as close, if not closer, with their children even though they spent considerably less time with them. Several fathers claimed that their wives seemed "naturally tuned in" to their children: that they had some natural, innate ability to understand and read their children, which he did not possess. Although the majority of stay-at-home fathers claimed they were able to perform childcare and household duties just as well as their wives, it seems that emotions are a terrain that remain difficult to navigate for these men. Perhaps they are afraid to give in completely to the emotional side of parenting, because this would push the limits of gender too far. Perhaps these

men feel that by putting up a barrier between themselves, emotions, and their children, they can still hold onto traditional notions of rational, stoic masculinity.

In our society any behaviors that challenge hegemonic masculinity are denied legitimization as masculine (Bird, 1996). To demonstrate emotion is to challenge hegemonic masculinity. Men, therefore, suppress such behaviors, such as emotions, that might question his masculinity (Bird, 1996). Masculinity perpetuates through the social norm of emotional detachment. Young boys detach themselves from their mothers and develop gender identities in relation to that which they are not (Bird, 1996 and Chodorow, 1974). To express feelings and emotions is associated with feminine behaviors (Bird, 1996). Masculinity is defined by what is not feminine, and by extension, not showing emotion.

Emotions seem to be a dangerous, insecure territory for these fathers to enter, pushing them too far into the realm of femininity. Rather his ability to communicate and understand his children came from experience and spending time with them.

> "When we run into problems I tend to get angry more easily than my wife. I have a shorter fuse. She's more understanding…Women are just better at working through those kind of problems than men. They have a higher tolerance and comfort with working through things. Men just want to solve it and move on…Something about it must be biology. There is something more nurturing about women. Men just try to get through things, but women really live in the moment with their kids." (Edward, NY)

> "My wife is a fantastic mom. I think I learned how to be a good parent from her, even though she was always working." (Denis, D.C.)

> "I relied on my wife a lot for help. She understood what they needed better. She could hear them cry and know 'They need a nap' or 'Oh, they're hungry'…I think it's part socialization and part instinct. My wife grew up babysitting and helping out her mom, so she had some experience that I didn't have…There are some things with parenting that I still don't get that make me think that part of this has to be instinct." (Mark D., MA)

> "Despite being with them all the time, I just don't feel deeply linked to them. They are the way they are despite me being there. But I do feel like my wife has a closeness with them that I will never have." (Willy, NY)

> "Even though my wife loves her job, our children and her family always come first to her. I obviously love my kids, but I sometimes won't think to put them first the way she does. If I'm in the middle of something, sometimes I'll do that first before tending to their needs. Guys are socialized to focus on work. Lucky for me, my work pretty much is my family, so that's where I focus most of my attention." (Aldo, Japan)

> "There's a huge difference between the mother and the father staying at home. There's something that a mother provides that a father doesn't…My wife was always the first one up in the middle of the night if one of them was crying. Women are just wired differently to pick up on those things." (Johnny, LA)

> "I think there's something natural between a mother and her child. Mothers are very nurturing people. A bond must form at birth and through nursing that men will never have. But I'm no less loving than my wife; and although I may not have that same bond with my kids, it doesn't mean that my relationship with them is any less, it's just different. That's a benefit to them. To have different relationships with each parent." (Dan, D.C.)

These responses suggest that parenting is both a learned and natural role. Almost all fathers believe they are just as capable to be parents as their wives. They were able to establish emotional relationships with their children, which they may not have had they held a full-time job. This thought proposes the idea that anyone can be a good parent, regardless of his or her gender, if one is willing to put in the physical and emotional time and energy.

At the same time, several of these fathers clearly stated that they felt their wives had a special bond with their children even though they spent less time with them. Whether or not a biological, innate maternal instinct exists in women, we will probably never know. It is possible that what seems innate and natural in women exists only because men are taught to distance and repress emotions as a way of constructing masculinity.

Nancy Chodorow argues that a man's inability or reluctance to express emotion begins in childhood. The daughter, or the feminine personality, defines herself in relation and connection to her mother. The son, or the masculine personality, must define himself in opposition to his mother and all things feminine. The boy must identity with a "fantasied masculine role". He defines masculinity in terms of negativity: what is not feminine. Therefore, he rejects his mother, his dependence on her, and represses feminine feelings inside himself (Chodorow, 1974).

How will a child's masculinity or femininity be affected when the father is the primary caregiver? Will boys learn to construct masculinity in terms of relation and connectivity to their father, instead of in negative terms? The more important questions we should ask are how a child's experience might differ with a stay-at-home mother vs. a stay-at-home father, and how these differences might matter. I will look into these questions later in this section.

IV. *Frustrations and Challenges as a Stay-at-Home Father*

Over and over again fathers stressed that they would not trade their experience as a stay-at-home father for anything in the world. Respondents found the experience rewarding for themselves, their children, and their spouse. Despite their rave reviews, however, many fathers also discussed frustrations and challenges as a stay-at-home dad. These frustrations existed on both practical and emotional levels. The most common annoyance was a feeling of running of out time, or never having enough time. Some men also expressed a feeling of needing to catch up, or being behind in their career. A few fathers also talked about the social loneliness that comes with staying at home full-time with children. In the end, however, almost all fathers said that despite any frustrations,

you learn to work through the challenges and make things work; because at the end of the day, it's not about them, "it's about doing what's best for the kids."

Lack of Time

The notion of time has been present throughout the discussion of findings thus far. Respondents talked about time in its most literal and concrete sense during our conversations about their frustrations as a stay-at-home father. Many felt that there simply was not enough time in the day to complete everything they hoped to do. Between childcare, housework, and personal life, there is always something to be done. Fathers seem frustrated with the fact that they were unable to completely finish a task and cross it off a list. Through these frustrations, however, fathers seemed to learn how to manage their time, and expressed the belief that parenting is not a simple task; it is an ongoing, growing process.

> "I was absolutely exhausted at times. I would come home at 7 AM after working all night, and then take care of the kids. The days felt endless, but I also felt like there was just never enough time in the day. Not enough time for sleep." (Paul, MA)

> "I was excited to take on my role as a stay-at-home dad, but it was exhausting at first. That never changed. Your job keeps going until they go to bed. You never get a break." (Mark B., MA)

> "I saw a *New Yorker* cartoon once that had two stay-at-home moms. One of them said to the other 'You know the best thing about being a stay-at-home mom?...School.' And that is so true. Naps and school are your savior. It was so exhausting, so intense at times. Sometimes it feels like you're under assault. But you just try to get through it, even though it's difficult and frustrating." (Edward, NY)

> "It was frustrating in the beginning, when I was trying to figure out how to get work done while I was at home. I would get so frustrated that I just couldn't get things done. Eventually I just had to accept that you just can't do it all, and that's okay." (Bruce, MA)

Time was a recurring theme throughout all of my conversations. Fathers' availability of time was a reason for them to stay at home. Time and flexibility were also dividing factors in which parent takes on which tasks. The lack of time was a shared frustration among many of the fathers. This suggests that time is one of the biggest demands of parenthood. As a parent your time becomes synonymous with your children's time. Although it may be difficult to lose personal time, it seems to be a requirement of parents that you give yourself physically and emotionally to your children.

The frustrations these men expressed about the lack of time might also say something about our larger culture. We are a society that believes in the plight of the individual. We value individual growth and success; and anything that may inhibit that growth should be avoided. We have all been socialized to yearn for personal space and time. These fathers are not selfish for wishing they had more personal time; they simply express a desire we have all been taught. The idea of giving up the path to individual success is uncommon in today's society, especially for men. Despite their frustrations, however, these men demonstrate that they did not give up or sacrifice anything. Rather, they chose a different path to a different type of success.

Feeling Behind

Some fathers, however, did express feeling behind or out of the loop, after choosing to stay at home over a more conventional career path.

> "Sometimes I feel envious of guys who have really successful careers. Sometimes I'll hide behind the fact that I teach some legal classes. I think about what I could've done had I been in business. I know that it's okay not to be the richest guy, and that I should be proud of what I do. The way I like to see it is I'm rich in the things that really matter to me, and I'm better for it." (Aldo, Japan)

> "It set my career way back. I'm 52 and still playing catch up. But I have absolutely no regrets. I got the chance with be with my kids, and it was worth every penny…If I worked full-time I wouldn't be as close with them. I wouldn't have had as much of an impact on setting values." (Mark B., MA)

> "I'm 8 years out of professional existence. Sometimes I think what if I started working earlier and actually anticipated a career path for myself." (Willy, NY)

> "When the kids were younger, about 10 to 15 years ago, I used to be very conscious of walking my daughters downtown in baby carriages. I used to carry them in those backpacks. I somehow felt more comfortable and less obvious with that. Pushing them in a carriage felt like carrying a sign that said 'no I'm not at work, I'm at home with the kids'." (Edward, NY)

> "I came to a point where I didn't feel fully satisfied. Like I had this drive to do something more. I hated my career before, so I knew I didn't want to go back to that…I eventually decided to go into teaching part-time, since I loved working at the CO-OP school with my kids so much. Being able to experience that with the kids is what helped me to find what was missing in my life." (Johnny, LA)

The decision that these fathers make to stay at home is similar to that which mothers have traditionally had to make: to pursue a career, or to stay at home to raise a family. Their frustrations suggest that it is nearly impossible to have the best of both worlds. Through their stories, however, these men show how they work with their families to come to the best arrangement that benefits everyone.

Social Loneliness

A few fathers also described their experience as somewhat isolating and lonely. Because men were home all day with their children, they did not have much interaction with friends or other adults. This lack of interaction is compounded by the fact that stay-at-home fathers are relatively new phenomena, and there are not many support networks that they can rely on.

> "I'm pretty laidback, but that also made it more isolating for me, because I didn't go out of my way to meet other people. All of the parent groups in our community were organized by and for mothers. I couldn't find any support groups or organizations nearby for dads…I grew deeply depressed when my first

child went away to college. I was there for them, and they were there for me everyday when they were kids. I realized they didn't need me like that anymore, I no longer had them as a security blanket." (Michael, NH)

"I think some distance might have been valuable between me and the kids. Sometimes I just felt a little too wrapped up in it, like I was stuck in a bad rhythm, and lost touch with the world outside of kids." (Willy, NY)

"Now that they're both in college, I get pretty lonely. It was really hard for the first 3 to 4 months that they were both away. Sometimes I think I see ghosts: memories of them when they were little, playing with them, or taking them places. The loneliness got easier over time, but it was definitely an adjustment." (Mark D., MA)

"Do it for the kids"

Although some fathers voiced their frustrations with the lack of time, feeling behind, and social isolation of staying at home, they made a point to say that these frustrations were not unique to stay-at-home fathers, but to parents who stay at home full-time. Many expressed that they believe stay-at-home moms experience similar frustrations. That is to say no one type of parent is better or easier than another.

"The problems I ran into wouldn't have been any different if my wife was the one at home. As a parent things come up all the time, regardless if you're a man or a woman, and you just have to learn how to deal with them." (Bruce, MA)

"There were times when I just wanted to scream and rip my hair out. But I imagine it's the same thing for stay-at-home moms." (Aldo, Japan)

Additionally, the majority of the fathers said that regardless of the challenges that come with being a parent, one must find a way to work through the issues for the sake of the children. These fathers demonstrated a willingness to do whatever it takes to assure the well being of their children, even if it means losing their own personal time and social life.

"I wouldn't have missed the chance to be with them for the world… Kids go through stages. First they need you, then they don't want you there, and then they come back looking for your help. All I could do was be there when they needed

me, when they didn't. I did the best I could to be there for them 100 percent." (Paul, MA)

"I think my parents' generation had it right: to have a parent there for the children around the clock. Kids with working parents are at a disadvantage. Our kids knew that I was always there for them, no matter when or where it was. Although they may not know it or say it, I think they really appreciate that." (Mark D., MA)

V. ***Masculinity and Gender***

Here is where we get to the heart of my study. I originally set out to discover the extent to which we simultaneously "do gender" and the extent to which gender structures us. How does gender govern our everyday behaviors and actions, especially when we take on roles that are untraditional to our gender? More specifically, to what extent does gender play a role in structuring the everyday lives of stay-at-home fathers? At the same time, I hoped to discover to what extent stay-at-home fathers "do gender" and emphasize traditional masculinity (or deemphasize) in their parental duties, styles, and philosophies.

Overall most fathers were well-versed in basic sociological terms. Many fathers used the terms "socialized" and "biology", or discussed "nature vs. nurture", in our conversations about masculinity. They also seemed well aware of the part that gender plays in structuring expectations and roles in society. Their ability to talk about such abstract topics might be that they were expecting me to ask such questions, and therefore prepared some thoughts in advance. It is also possible that because respondents do take on an untraditional role, their nonconformity has pushed them to think about issues that they normally would not consider if they conformed to traditional gender roles.

Regardless of their overall awareness of gender expectations, most fathers began this discussion with phrases indicating that stay-at-home fatherhood was not something that they previously aspired to do.

> "Being a stay-at-home dad never occurred to me until it actually happened." (Johnny, LA)

> "If you asked me if I would be a stay-at-home dad when I was younger, I would've been like 'What are you talking about?'" (Mark D., MA)

> "I never thought of being a stay-at-home dad. It wasn't even on my radar. But things are starting to change now, and it's becoming much more of an accepted reality for people." (Edward, NY)

Most respondents attributed this to the fact that they "grew up in a different time". Being a stay-at-home father was not even an option when they were children. These men never though to be stay-at-home fathers not because they were opposed to the idea, but because it had never before been brought to their consciousness.

Growing up in a Different Time

Most of the fathers reflected on their childhood and their families as a reference point for their own gender ideals. Respondents stressed how they "grew up in a different time." Their parents were much more traditional in the sense that the father always worked. The mother worked in a few of the families, but she was never the primary source of income for the family. Respondents' parents expressed a range of ideas on gender roles: some were much more traditional, while others were more progressive and accepting to alternative gender roles.

> "Both my mother and father always worked. My father was a Marine, and my mother waitress. So although both of them worked, it was very gendered labor. Their roles were very typical of the time. My dad never held the primary responsibility of what needed to be done around the house… I have two older brothers, so we grew up watching war movies with our dad. There was definitely a distinctive culture of masculinity and patriotism in my family." (Michael, NH)

> "My parents had a hard time accepting it when I told them that I would stay home with my children full-time. My father has a very strong provider ethic. There's an assumption that men will work and women will stay at home." (Bob, MA)

> "My mom stayed at home full-time. Both of my parents were very easy-going, so I think I got a lot of my parenting philosophy from them. My dad wasn't too traditional. He wasn't like that scary father figure. I always felt like I could talk to him. When he got laid off from work, my mom got a job, and he helped out at home. There was never a sense that he couldn't do certain things because he was a man, or that my mom couldn't work because she was a woman. They just did what they needed to take care of us." (Paul, MA)

> "I've always had very progressive ideas about gender. My mom always worked, and my dad didn't, so I never really knew what a traditional family was." (Willy, NY)

> "My parents had pretty divided roles, but my dad always helped around the house. My dad worked full time. He coached our sports teams and took us skiing. My mom stayed at home until my oldest brother was in college. They were pretty traditional about who should do what, but it was pretty fluid too." (Mark D., MA)

Even though these fathers "grew up in a different time" when the men worked and the women stayed at home, their families seemed to have more fluid and flexible ideas about gender. Although they followed traditional gender expectations, they did not believe that men and women were only capable of those specific duties. There seemed to be an overall understanding that families would help each other out, regardless of the task, in times of need. This philosophy is quite similar to the way in which these stay-at-home fathers and their families operate: they do whatever it takes to make things work for their children.

Personal Gender Ideologies

Perhaps the flexible gender ideals of their families is what led to the more progressive gender ideologies of these stay-at-home fathers. Most respondents stated that they believe themselves to have quite untraditional, progressive, and liberal views on gender. Some men said it as simply as, "I am liberal when it comes to definitions of gender and masculinity." Most fathers demonstrated their progressive ideologies through conversations about the equal ability of men and women to be good parents.

> "It's silly to have gendered divisions. It's a problem if the dad stays at home and only does manly things. That's just unfair and unacceptable. Not to mention you wouldn't get anything done. You can't say 'you should do this because you're a man, or you can't do this because you're a woman'. It's just not practical." (Mark D., MA)

> "There's no advantage to any model. There's not set pattern to follow. We have all these expectations of what a mother should do and what a father should do, but those expectations don't reflect reality. You've just gotta do what's best and makes the most sense, not what everyone expects you to do." (Willy, NY)

> "Parenting should be equal. Both parents are put in situations that you have to deal with regardless of your sex, and not one is better at doing those things than the other." (Paul, MA)

> "My wife and I lived in San Francisco when we first met. Being there increased my sensitivity and awareness to gender issues and sexuality… Parenting is really about the provisions available to take care of the kids, not men versus women, mothers versus fathers." (Michael, NH)

Respondents suggest that men and women are capable of performing the same parental and household duties. Fathers expressed that strict labor divisions are simply impractical. If something needs to be done or a child needs emotional support, both parents should be held responsible for assuring that it is done. Men and women are capable of rising up to the task on demand. This suggests that the demands of a role, not gender, dictate the behaviors of stay-at-home fathers.

> "It doesn't matter how competent of a parent you think you are. We all make mistakes. You just have to have confidence in what you do, so that your kids know they're loved, valued, and someone has their back." (Aldo, Japan)

> "I don't know how I figured out how to do everything. You never think you could take care of your children like their mother, until you just do it. You'll always find a way to do what's needed no matter what it is or who you are, as long as you're committed to your kids." (Bruce, MA)

Not only did respondents express that men and women are equally capable of rising up to the task on demand, but also that there is no benefit to one over the other. Men and

women may perform these tasks differently, but that does not mean that one is any worse or less than the other.

> "I don't think you can erase mother and father roles. Both parents are fully competent of doing the same things, they just do them in different ways, but that's not a bad thing." (Johnny, NY)

> "Neither a man nor a woman is better suited to stay at home with their children. Neither is better than the other, they're just different. It depends more on your personality than your sex. Some women have more masculine characteristics, and vice versa." (Bruce, MA)

> "Other than giving birth and breast-feeding, there is no difference between a mother and a father when it comes to parenting. Everyone is different, but that works to the benefit of the children." (Dan, D.C.)

As discussed earlier, it is possible that interests and personality play a part in how a father might perform a task differently than the mother. Through the respondents' discussion of gender ideologies, however, gender still plays a part in coloring how a man might do something differently than a woman. What is important to remember is that gender does not lead one parent to be better than the other. Rather, gender does cause these tasks to be performed differently by men and women, but they are just as effective and capable of caring for the children.

VI. ***Summary of Findings***

What was most striking to me throughout these conversations was the fact that these men still seem colored by gendered behaviors and expectations. I expected most of these fathers to have extremely progressive and open definitions of gender. Through their parenting styles and activities with children, such as an emphasis on physical play and sports, the approach of stay-at-home fathers is still influenced by traditional ideas of masculinity. Respondents also overtly stated that men and women do parenting differently because of gender.

> "I think mothers are intuitively inclined to recognize the differences between their children. But I think socialization is also part of that…I see it in the different schools my children go to. The ethic at my son's school is like Sparta. It's super competitive, and the guys just aren't nice to each other. The environment at the girls' school, however, is very cooperative, loving, and warm. I can see how those different approaches would teach girls to be more maternal in the future." (Aldo, Japan)

> "It's hard because we're fighting against what has happened in the US since the beginning. These mother/father roles go back to history." (Bob, MA)

> "Women have always done the caregiving because that's how it's been historically. But things are changing. As more women have entered the workforce, so too have men taken on more caregiving roles." (Mark B., MA)

> "It's part socialization and part instinct…We learn how to be a man or a woman from our own parents. But there are some things I've encountered in all of this that I just don't get, where my wife just seems to know naturally." (Mark D., MA)

> "I don't think parenting will ever be totally gender neutral, because women give birth. But ideas of masculinity are changing in society. The politics have changed. More and more men are staying at home with their kids, which is prove that maybe gender will never go away, but ideas about it can change." (Edward, D.C.)

Most respondents, however, seem aware that gender is not static, definite, and scientific. They seem aware that history and socialization play a role in structuring traditional gender roles. The caregiving tendencies of mothers may seem natural or innate, because this is what women have been expected to do for centuries.

> "Women are born into a world of expectations to become good mothers. As a stay-at-home dad there weren't any expectations, because, well, how could there be?... The idea of a maternal link is a myth. But the fact that this myth exists means that people buy into it, and it's still shaping the way we define mothers and fathers." (Willy, NY)

> "I think women seem better or more natural at mothering just because that's how it's always been." (Mark B., MA)

There seem to be some contradictions in the words of these stay-at-home fathers. While some believe that mothers are more naturally linked to their children, fathers also claim

that their gender does not play a role in parenting capabilities. Fathers claim that their masculinity has not hindered his ability to be a loving parent. While these men believe women are more emotionally in-tune with their children, maybe what they are trying to say is that stay-at-home fathers are also in-tune with their children, just in different ways Although the parenting experience may be different for an individual based on his or her gender, one's experience and capability is no less because of this; they are simply different. Fathers, therefore, can be just as compassionate and caring as mothers. Perhaps the term "maternal" should be made void, as these fathers claim that they are just as competent and capable of assuming maternal qualities.

> "I'm just as loving of a parent as my wife. My kids used to say to me, 'I like having you home, Daddy.' They never felt like they were missing out on some kind of 'maternal love' because I was home." (Dan, D.C.)

> "There's this image of the absent, aloof father in books, media, TV. This image is extremely misleading, because there is this idea that men just don't care about their kids as much as women do. That really bothers me, because it's obviously untrue…Being a stay-at-home dad just felt so natural for me. I would do anything for my kids." (Denis, D.C.)

These stay-at-home fathers seem aware that they carry gendered beliefs because they were raised in a different generation. Most of these men grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. For the most part, their parents followed the traditional breadwinner father/homemaker mother model. Stay-at-home fathers were not even on the radar at this time. These stay-at-home fathers recognize that what they are doing is still relatively new. However, they also express hope for the future of family and gender definitions. Perhaps their children will have less gendered views having been raised in an untraditional family structure. These men hope their children will continue these views into the future to help make varied family structures more accepted and parenting more gender neutral.

> "Kids are really adaptable. They'll take whatever you give them and try to do something with it…This generation of children will grow up in a time when it will be much more socially acceptable for men to be nurturing and sensitive people." (Edward, NY)
>
> "Having a stay-at-home dad is good for them. It opens up their minds. They realize it's okay to think outside the box. They'll grow up knowing that every family is different." (Dan, D.C.)
>
> "My kids are shocked by their friends' dads who don't help with anything around the house." (Bob, MA)
>
> "Is the kids' experience different with a stay-at-home mom versus a stay-at-home dad? I'm sure it's different, but neither in a good or bad way. It's all just another grain of sand eroding the value of traditional family structure. The ideal of a traditional nuclear family will never occur to my kids, since they never even knew what that was." (Willy, NY)

The general belief that I found in all of the interviews is the overall role of a family is to always do what is best for the children. Parents do whatever it takes. It is most important to have someone, regardless of his or her gender, who is there for them 100 percent of the time. Following traditional gender roles for the sake of traditional is impractical and would ignore the ongoing physical and emotional needs of the children.

Not one father said he regretted becoming a stay-at-home father. Although it was a big adjustment with many challenges and frustrations, respondents said they would not trade the experience for anything. Being a stay-at-home father was both a learning and growing experience for the children, the spouse, and the father himself.

Conclusion

Going into my research I hoped that the interviews would serve as an open forum for respondents. I hoped that my study would give voice to a population of men about which little is known. The interviews were successful in that they fostered open, honest communication. Our interactions were more of a conversation or discussion, rather than

a formal interview. Not only were our conversations an outlet for these stay-at-home fathers to express their own experiences and stories, but also an eye-opening experience for me. This topic allowed me to speak with a group of people who I would most likely not interact. My daily interactions consist of conversations with fellow students and friends, family, and professors. Very rarely, if ever, do I have in-depth conversations with other adult men. My study on stay-at-home fathers has allowed me to gain some insights into a world unknown to me: being a man and being a parent.

Not only did this topic lead me to speak with a group of people I rarely communicate with, but also with a group of people about which little is known in our society in general. With the changing economy and more women in the workforce than ever before, family structures have been changing rapidly within the past couple decades. Due to the fast pace at which information is exchanged and cultural changes occur, research has not been able to keep up with the ever-changing family structure. My study is truly exploratory in that I had the opportunity to learn about a growing population of men, about which we have yet to uncover.

That being said, I was also somewhat nervous to interview a group of people with whom I have little in common. How might I be able to relate and understand them due to our age and sex differences? Would respondents not feel comfortable opening up to me because I am a woman? Other studies have shown that it can go both ways. In one study, for example, a female researcher interviewed divorced fathers. She claimed that respondents "were both presenting themselves as *masculine* persons…and working on proving their manhood during their conversations with me…Yet, these men disclosed

their experiences and feelings to me…*because* I am a woman…they were relating to me on the basis of their expectations of me as a woman" (Arendell, 1997).

Another qualitative study interviewed men about the sexist treatment of nurses by physicians. Some respondents were interviewed by men, others were interviewed by women. The study points out that a joint understanding usually forms between interviewer and respondent. In this case, "the process of developing a joint understanding involves gendered assumptions about the background experiences shared" (Williams & Heikes, 1993). They found that men interviewed by other men assumed that he could empathize with the physicians. Men interviewed by women assumed that she could empathize with the female nurse. Respondents, therefore, tailored their answered based on where they believe the interviewer's sympathies would lie (Williams & Heikes, 1993).

While these are valid concerns, I found that my age and sex did not seem to limit our conversations; if anything, they enhanced it. As demonstrated through the stories and thoughts of respondents in the previous section, the men were extremely open, honest, comfortable, and sometimes even emotional, in our conversations. I believe that because I am a woman they felt more comfortable opening up and talking about emotions. Perhaps respondents would not have opened up to a male interviewer, because this might have breeched some code of masculinity: guys don't talk to other guys about emotions; that's too feminine. Furthermore, because these men knew I am a student and that I chose to speak with them about their lives, they were probably more willing and eager to share their stories.

Although I was able to pick up reoccurring themes, values, and behaviors from our conversations, my sample is limited. While these themes and behaviors may hold true to the group of men I spoke with, they cannot be applied to the larger population of stay-at-home fathers. My sample was relatively small, consisting of thirteen men. I contacted respondents through convenience sampling. I started by asking friends and family if they knew any stay-at-home fathers, and once I spoke with a few, they put me in touch with other stay-at-home dads. Because of convenience sampling, I was unable to control for several factors, namely race and socioeconomic class.

All of the respondents in my study were white men from middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds. For these men, being a stay-at-home father was more of a choice or a luxury. Their wives made enough money to support the family on one income. Many other stay-at-home fathers do not have this luxury. Many are forced to stay at home because of unemployment or other serious financial circumstances. Further research will need to look into how race and class factor into the lives of stay-at-home fathers and their families. I suspect that the structural differences between the life of a stay-at-home white upper-class father and that of a lower class or minority father will lead to different experiences and divisions of labor in the family. Further research should also consider how race and class differences might factor into the different ways stay-at-home fathers conceive of and construct masculinity.

Additionally, all of the interviews were conducted via phone. Respondents were from California, Washington D.C., New York, New Hampshire, and even Japan. Due to the limited time and resources for my study, it was not feasible for me to arrange face-to-face interviews with respondents. It is possible, therefore, that some communication and

expression was lost over the phone. The facial expressions, body language, and environment of the respondent can be just as telling as their responses. Someone may say one thing, but his or her fidgeting or gestures may reveal another.

Future research will go into the homes of stay-at-home fathers and observe how these men act in their own homes. What do these homes look like? How are they organized? How do the fathers interact with their children? How does he interact with his spouse? How does the spouse interact with their children, and is this different from the father's interaction?

I realize that my sample is limited in its size, demographics, and amount of face-to-face interaction. However, the stories that I heard from these men speak for themselves. Respondents were open, honest, and emotional. While I cannot apply my findings to a larger population, I found several reoccurring themes that should spark further research.

Most striking and unexpected was the overall belief among stay-at-home fathers that while he was a good parent, the mother still seemed to be better at childcare. Several fathers claimed that their wives seemed more "in tune" or more "connected" with their children. Many respondents believe that their wives are more natural or innate caregivers, even though they spend less time with their children because of a full-time job.

I expected stay-at-home fathers to say that men and women are equal caregivers; there is no natural or biological basis to the maternal instinct; in fact, both men and women posses "maternal" qualities, but men are socialized to suppress them. While most respondents claimed that they were just as *capable* of being a loving, caring parent, they

still seem to believe that women are more natural and better parents. This contradiction requires further analysis and research. Perhaps stay-at-home fathers believe in a biological basis to parenting as a way of maintaining masculinity. It is possible that men believe women are natural or better caregivers as a way of constructing masculinity by rejecting femininity. Perhaps these stay-at-home fathers are correct: maybe women are biologically wired to hear their baby's cry and wake up in the middle of the night. While I do not believe we can ever pinpoint the source of such sentiments, I do believe that further research may help us better understand where such ideas come from.

Future research will also look at stay-at-home father families from the working mother's perspective. Do working moms feel as in-tune and connected to their children as their husbands believe? Or, do these mothers believe their husbands are just as loving, caring parents as themselves? In the same way that men claim women are better caregivers as a way of constructing masculinity, perhaps working mothers feel they have to overcompensate in their caregiving efforts as a way of constructing femininity.

Another recurring theme in my research was the in the ways these stay-at-home fathers construct masculinity. Many fathers emphasized physical activities and playing sports with their children. Throughout history, sports have served as the epicenter of masculine values: physical strength, aggression, competitiveness, and achievement (Messner, 1995). It is possible that men stressed physical sport not only because they are more active with their children than their wives, but also as a way to maintain or prove their masculinity to others. Playing sports with their children is a way for stay-at-home fathers to say, "Maybe I'm doing a mother's job, but at least I'm doing it in a manly way."

Similarly, while men claimed there were no divisions in parental duties, respondents continually said that their wives handled the emotional problems, and he took on more concrete issues with their children. Respondents claimed there were no formal divisions of labor. Rather, responsibilities seemed to follow a natural order. Men claimed they were better at building projects and fixing things, while their wives seemed to better understand the emotional needs of their children. Once again, fathers repeated that their wives seemed more natural in dealing with emotions. Some fathers felt that they were unable to understand or connect with their children on an emotional level. Similar to their emphasis on sports, this "restrictive emotionality" seems to be another way in which these stay-at-home fathers construct masculinity. Respondents juxtaposed his lack of emotional connection to his wife's seemingly natural emotionality, as a way of saying "Emotions are feminine. Because I restrict emotion, I am not feminine. Therefore, I am masculine."

It seems, however, that stay-at-home fathers are capable of expressing and understanding emotion. Several of the fathers said that they enjoy "talking out" problems with their children. One father claimed that he has cried with his children before when they are upset. Another father said he grew deeply depressed when both of his children left for college. These fathers know what it means to be sad, angry, or upset, and they know how to express such feelings. These fathers, however, do seem unaware or unwilling to cross that barrier, and overtly state they have emotional relationships with their children. Men may be unwilling or unaware of expressing emotion because they have been socialized to believe that men should be stoic, and to show emotion is to show weakness, or femininity.

In future research, it would be interesting to look at how working mothers construct femininities. Do working mothers strive to build emotional relationships with their children as a way of demonstrating femininity? Do working mothers feel that their femininity is in question because they do not stay at home with their children full time? Another interesting study could compare whose masculinity or femininity is more in question when performing an untraditional role: stay-at-home fathers or working mothers? Is it more socially acceptable for a man or a woman to take on untraditional parenting roles? Which are more fluid and flexible, society's masculine ideals or society's feminine ideals?

One area of discussion that I did not analyze in great detail was the negative experiences of these stay-at-home fathers. On the whole, respondents had nothing but positive stories to tell. Fathers claimed that their families and friends were accepting and supported his being a stay-at-home dad. There were only a few stories told about negative experiences or reactions from others.

> "One time I was sitting in Pete's Coffeehouse with my kids. My son, Jack, spilled a cup of water on the floor. As I'm cleaning it up I heard a woman say 'if his mom was here, he wouldn't've spilled.' That really triggered something in me. I went up to her and said, 'Who are you to judge my family? You don't know me. His mother could be dead for all you know!'" (Johnny, LA)

> "A couple years ago, my wife was on a cruise with her mom. They were sitting at dinner one night, and another guy at the table asked where her husband was. She explained that I was a stay-at-home dad, and was with the kids. He proceeded to tell her how wrong that was. If I was there for that I would've dragged his ass outside, and fulfilled his idea of what it means to be a man. I was so angry when she told me that story." (Mark D., MA)

These negative encounters were the only two out of all my conversations. While these stories are interesting, what is more telling is the fact that so few fathers discussed any

negative experiences. Perhaps respondents truly did have only positive experiences. It is also possible that selection bias within my sample affected such responses. Because these men are stay-at-home fathers by choice, this was something they were willing and excited to do. They were not forced into this position because of financial or other extenuating circumstances. Fathers viewed their position as a stay-at-home dad as an opportunity, rather than a burden.

Furthermore, because my sample consisted of white, middle- and upper-middle class men, they are most likely quite connected to helpful resources and communities. Access to supportive school, medical, and friend groups would most likely foster more positive experiences in the fathers and their families. Further research should look into the frequency and seriousness of negative experiences of stay-at-home fathers of other races and socioeconomic classes. My guess is that as being a stay-at-home dad becomes less of a choice, the frequency of negative experiences will increase.

Selection bias also occurs in the geographic location of respondents. Because I used convenience sampling, I could not control for a special city or region of the country. Most respondents just happened to be from metropolitan, progressive cities: New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., or around Boston. In such cities, alternative lifestyles are typically widely accepted. Being a gay or a stay-at-home dad might even be seen as trendy. It is possible that I would have heard more negative responses had I spoke with stay-at-home fathers from more southern and conservative areas.

Religion was another topic that only came up a few times in my conversations. Respondents did not say they were or were not religious; the topic simply did not come up. There were only two respondents who did delve into the role of religion in their life

as a stay-at-home father. Aldo is a Mormon and lives in Japan. Aldo explained that in the Mormon culture it is the religious preference for the mother to stay at home with the family. In fact, The Proclamation of the Family says that men are to bring in the money, and women are to stay at home. Overall, it states that parents should help as equal partners. Aldo claimed that his church community is progressive enough to understand the circumstances of his family. He takes a more liberal interpretation to The Proclamation: while he may not be the main source of income, he is certainly an equal helper to the family.

Dan, a stay-at-home father from the Washington D.C. area, claimed that his Catholic identity has certainly had an affect on his life. He claims that religion has helped him teach his children wrong versus right. Dan believes that their faith will set them on the right path, let them make mistakes, and help them find their way back. Dan also said that his parish has been extremely supportive. "By feeling loved and accepted in our community, I understood that there really is no right or wrong way to be a parent. It's all about the love and being there for the kids," said Dan.

Above all conversations about divisions of labor, parenting styles, and masculinity, these fathers demonstrate that to be a good parent is to be there 100 percent. Whether that parent is male or female, masculine or feminine, that does not matter. What is most important is that someone is there who is physically and emotionally dedicated to his or her children. These stay-at-home fathers spoke extremely highly of their experiences, and they believe their spouses and children would say the same. Many fathers claimed that becoming a stay-at-home dad improved their quality of life, and believe that it improved the overall happiness and quality of life of the rest of his family.

I hope that this study shows that both men and women can be good, loving parents. Parenting knows no gender. Gender is not comprised of binary and finite categories. Rather, gender is constantly constructed by the cultural and structural demands placed on the individual. In everyday life, we perform and do gender to live up to a masculine or feminine ideal. These stay-at-home fathers show how they do gender in an untraditional circumstance. While it is improbable that the gender binaries will ever be erased, changing the way we view parenting is a start.

I hope that the future holds more options for both men and women. Just as it has become more socially acceptable for women to work, it should become just as acceptable for men to stay at home. Even as more options open and things change, men and women will still find ways to construct masculinity and femininity. Their efforts, however, may change ideas of masculinity and femininity over time, so that strict mother and father roles dissipate, and parenting becomes one inclusive category.

Interview Guide

Introduction

1. What is the structural setup of your family? Married/divorced/remarried/widowed? How many children do you have? What are their ages?
2. What is your spouse's job? How often does she/he work?
3. Do work at all? From home? Part time? If so, what is this work? How many hours per week do you work?
4. How long have you been a stay-at-home father?
5. How was it decided that you would become a stay-at-home father?

Parental Duties

1. Walk me through a typical day. What is the first thing you do when you wake up, and what is the last thing you do before you go to sleep?
2. What tasks are you primarily responsible for? What tasks is your spouse primarily responsible for? How was this decided? Did you formulate guidelines or did the work just divide naturally?
3. Overall, what percentage of parenting and childcare are you doing and what percentage is your spouse doing?
4. 4 aspects of parenting
    a. Time- % of parental time you spend with children
    b. Work- chores of being a parent (making lunches, driving)
    c. Emotional parenting- tuned into children's emotional needs
    d. Management- keeping track of work and making sure everything gets done

    What percent do you and your spouse do of each?

Parental Strategies and Problem-Solving

1. What is your general approach to completing parental tasks? Are you more strategic and goal-oriented? Or are you more spontaneous and react to tasks as they arise?
2. Do you ever run into conflicts with your parental tasks? What might these conflicts be?
3. How do you typically respond to conflicts/problems in parenting and housework? Do you get anxious or frustrated? Or do you remain calm?
4. What is your usual approach to resolving conflicts? Are you more strategic and solution-focused? Or are you more expressive and emotion-focused?
5. How would you react in this situation: your in-laws are visiting and you still need to clean the bathrooms and prepare dinner for the night. Your child is home sick with the flu and needs your attention. How would you react in this situation? Walk me through your thought process. What would you do to make sure you get everything done?

Perceived Strength of Relationship with Children

1. How many hours do you spend with your children each day?
2. How much physical contact do you have with your children?
3. What activities do you do with your children on a daily basis?
4. How often do your children come to you for emotional support?

5. Do you think there are differences between your relationship with your children and your partner's relationship with your children? Do you think any of your children are closer to one of you than the other?
6. How do you feel when you are physically close with your children?
7. How do you feel when you are not with them?
8. Do you believe that your own happiness and well-being is intrinsically linked to that of your children?
9. On a scale of 1-10 (1-not strong at all, 10-strongest) how strong is your relationship with your child?
10. How do you think your child would rate the strength of your relationship on this same scale?

Perceived Strength of Relationship with Spouse

1. How many times a day do you talk to your spouse?
2. What is your most common form of communication? (phone, email, text message)
3. What do you talk about in these conversations? Is it primarily about housework and family, or unrelated topics as well?
4. Do you and your spouse ever argue about childcare and housework? If so, how do you resolve these arguments?
5. How emotionally connected do you feel with your partner?
6. Do you feel that the closeness of your relationship has changed at all since the start of your current family arrangement?
7. On a scale of 1-10 (1-not strong at all, 10-strongest) how strong is your relationship with your spouse?
8. How do you think your spouse would rate the strength of your relationship on this same scale?

Overall Satisfaction

1. What is your overall mood when performing parental tasks?
2. Are there certain tasks that you enjoy more than others? If so, which ones and why?
3. Is full-time fathering a career that you hope to follow for the rest of your children's younger years? Or is this just a temporary arrangement?
4. Do you feel fulfilled in your role as a stay-at-home father?
5. On a scale of 1-10 (1-not at all satisfied, 10-fully satisfied) how satisfied are you with your current position?
6. Is there anything you wish you could change about your role as a stay-at-home father? If so, what?

Fatherhood and Masculinity

1. Where or from whom have you learned the most about being a parent?
2. Can you describe the family you grew up in? What kinds of roles did your parents take in the family?
3. What specifically were your father's responsibilities in the family when you were a child? Are his responsibilities similar or different to your own responsibilities as a father?
4. Did your father's role as a parent have any affect on your present role and how you define fatherhood?

5. What was your idea of "being a man" when you were growing up? What did a "man" look like? How did he act? What was his job?
6. How do you think society defines masculinity today? What are some common examples (personality or physical traits?)
7. What is your personal definition of masculinity? Is it similar or different to mainstream ideas of masculinity?
8. If your definition is different than that of the mainstream, how, why, and when did your personal definition change?
9. Did your definition of masculinity change before or after assuming your role as a stay-at-home father? Do you feel you had to change your idea of masculinity to fit with your role?
10. Have you ever felt that your "masculinity" was threatened by your role as a stay-at-home father?
11. How do you think others perceive your masculinity? Parents? Friends? Spouse?
12. Based on your experiences, what do you think makes a good father? A good mother?
13. Are there certain tasks and responsibilities that remain exclusive to a mother or father? Or are all responsibilities interchangeable?
14. What do you think has had the greatest effect on your ability to take on the role as a stay-at-home father? Do you feel that your sex has enabled or disabled you to perform any parental tasks?

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